



HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

PRESS RELEASE

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House Armed Services Committee Holds Hearing to Assess Military Training Teams Embedded with Iraqi Units

Washington, D.C. – The House Armed Services Committee today turned its attention to one of the prominent recommendations of the Iraq Study Group—the training and equipping of Iraqi military and police forces. The committee heard testimony from senior Army and Marine Corps general officers in order to assess the military training teams that are embedded with Iraqi Security Forces, including the military and police units within the Ministries of Defense and Interior.

“To ensure that Iraqi Security Forces are positioned for success and can benefit from much-needed combat experience, coalition forces must help Iraqis develop key skills and capabilities. Military transition teams are advising the Iraqis on the unfamiliar challenges of counterinsurgency operations. They are also serving as a useful conduit to the logistics support, intelligence information, and combat support – such as heavy artillery and air support – that coalition forces can provide,” said Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, in his written statement.

“If we get the transition team piece right, the effort to produce capable, battle-tested Iraqi forces stands a greater chance of success,” continued Hunter.

In a meeting at the White House earlier this week, Chairman Hunter and several Republican members of the House Armed Services Committee encouraged President Bush to work to accelerate the deployment of more Iraqi battalions into hotspots so they can gain combat operations experience, test their capabilities and gain confidence. In addition to Chairman Hunter, the members who met with President Bush included Rep. Mike Conaway (R-TX), Rep. Thelma Drake (R-VA), Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ), Rep. John Kline (R-MN), Rep. Robin Hayes (R-NC), Rep. John McHugh (R-NY), Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL), Rep. Jim Saxton (R-NJ), and Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX).

In his opening statement, Hunter expounded on the Iraqi Security Forces, “Too many Iraqi forces are in relatively calm areas. Only about 35 of 114 Iraqi combat battalions operate in notoriously violent areas such as Baghdad and Anbar province – while over 30 other units are in quieter areas that experience two or fewer attacks each day.”

Lieutenant General James L. Lovelace, Jr, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Army, reassured members that the commitment to training Iraqi security forces to meet the threats of terrorists and insurgents and to be combat ready is strong. "Transition teams are critical to the enhancement of security force capability and professionalism, and the transfer of security responsibility to the Iraq government." General Lovelace continued, "The Army has an enduring commitment to building the Iraqi national security forces while assisting with reconstruction of the country – we will stay as long as necessary, with the forces necessary, to ensure their stability." General Lovelace added that at this time, 6 division headquarters, 27 brigades, and over 88 combat battalions are in the lead.

Members questioned witnesses on the amount of training military transition teams received before being embedded with Iraqi forces. Major General Carter Ham, Commanding General of the Army's 1st Infantry Division, stressed that the training given to transition teams reflected lessons already learned. "The number one feedback that we received was that we needed more training on cultural awareness in preparing our officers." General Ham cited the incorporation of language coursework and instruction on understanding the influence of Islam and the tribal construct as an example of how training has evolved. General Lovelace added that the additional coursework for the transition teams was on top of foundational instruction to give them the necessary skill sets. "If they don't have the right skill sets, they are not sent," he said.

Major General George Flynn, Commanding General, Training and Education Command with the U.S. Marine Corps, echoed the comments by General Ham. "The Marine Corps continues to adapt to the changing requirements of Transition Team training to insure we provide our Marines the most relevant and demanding training available, not only to enable them to accomplish their mission, but to ensure their survival on the battlefield."

In response to questions on the level of competency and commitment of Iraqi commanders, General Ham was positive. "Generally, the attitude of Iraqi counterparts is very positive. The Iraqi commanders are concerned if they are fully supported by their government but aware of the role they play in their country." General Ham also cautioned members from judging whether the training of Iraqi security forces was successful based on criteria used to assess U.S. military forces. "We are not trying to build a mirror image of the American Army in Iraq."

General Lovelace reiterated that our forces are continually improving the training of those who serve in an advisory mission. "We have had starts and stops, but it's gaining momentum. We are moving toward success and we are building the necessary foundation."

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